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ABSTRACT

A 2-year seminar (jointly funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Pew Charitable Trusts) explored ways faculty at La Salle University in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) might integrate the emphasis on self-awareness as well as the historical, political, and ethical insight common in humanities courses with courses in other disciplines. The seminars, held among 15 faculty members, focused on central humanistic texts that would influence the redesigning of curriculum-wide courses. The fall seminar, limited to Arts and Sciences faculty, addressed the core curriculum. The spring seminar, titled "Facing Up to Modernity" included faculty from the School of Business and the School of Nursing and focused on the revision of courses for majors. Seminar discussions modeled the value of blending philosophical, historical, and literary perspectives to understand those ethical conflicts that beset the economic, social, and political conditions of modernity. Faculty were encouraged to consider how themes explored in the seminar related to ethical dilemmas in their own fields. Though the scope of the seminars did not permit extensive discussion of pedagogy, part of the workshop sessions dealt with writing assignments and classroom practices useful for helping students explore ethical issues. Distinguishing dialectic from scientific demonstrative discourse enables the exploration of moral and political issues, as James Kinneavy's, James Berlin's, and Carol Schneider's work on rhetoric indicates. Some faculty revised their courses almost immediately, and representative comments from other faculty show how they transformed their approaches. (SAM)

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Ethics, the Classics, and the Rhetorical Tradition: Integrating the Curriculum"

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The purpose of this essay is to describe the second seminar in a two year project of faculty seminars entitled "Finding a Common Language: Integrating the Curriculum Through the Humanities," funded jointly by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Pew Charitable Trusts and co-directed by William Sullivan of the philosophy department at La Salle and me. Some background information may explain our reasons for developing the project.

Faculty teaching in major programs, especially the preprofessional majors in which the bulk of La Salle students are presently found, recognized the need to bring self-awareness, historical, political and ethical insight more effectively into their courses. Faculty were also seeking ways to overcome the fragmentation in curricular content which seems to accompany increasing professionalization. A letter supporting the NEH proposal by professor in the Finance Department echoes these concerns. He says,

"I was pleased to learn from our discussion of your NEH grant proposal that a workable program integrating the humanities with other disciplines at La Salle is possible. Many of us in the Business School have noticed that our students seem to look at their undergraduate education as a discontinuous process: get through the first two years and then get the stuff that will land them a good job. ..Your proposal of encouraging a University-wide dialog on the integration of humanistic enquiry into all disciplines is welcome and timely.

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The business community's concern that today's college graduates are too narrowly educated is fairly well documented. This is usually interpreted to mean that business students are taught a considerable amount about solving quantative problems, but not much about the roles and responsibilities that businesses and their managers have in society. It seems to me that reinforcing their understanding of such ideals as freedom, justice, ethics and social responsibility through applications in business courses is a good way of meeting this criticism."

Prior to developing the grant proposal, hopeful possibilities for meeting these needs emerged from our experience with a small pilot project in which volunteer faculty from humanities departments, social sciences, and the business school read and discussed classical texts on the theme of progress and introduced exploratory writing in their courses.

The NEH/Pew project entitled, Finding a Common Language: Integrating the Curriculum Through the Humanities, an elaboration of the pilot project, attempted to engage the faculty in dialogue and debate about important ideas and goals related to the humanities as a preliminary, but necessary stage to revising courses. The goal of the seminars was described as enabling faculty to read and "discuss together central humanistic texts with the aim of redesigning curriculum-wide foundation courses and courses in major fields."

In each of the two years of the project, 15 faculty members met in semester-long seminars, which met two hours a week. The fall seminar, limited to Arts and Sciences faculty, focused on the core curriculum. The spring seminar

entitled Facing Up to Modernity, which also included faculty from the School of Business and School of Nursing focused on the major. The aim of both seminars was to provide possibilities for bridging disciplinary boundaries through common attention to significant texts addressing issues common to several fields and to emphasize the self-reflection and responsibility which are central to the humanistic tradition.

The spring seminar, which I will discuss in some detail, was organized around three sub-topics, "The Nature of Progess," "Commerce and Culture," and "Community and Democracy." Each of the sub-topics was developed through initial exploration of classical philosophical texts which were then used to structure reading and discussion of literary and historical texts. In the first segment, faculty read a selection of thinkers identified with the enunciation of nineteenth century conceptions of progress such as Auguste Comte, John Stewart Mill, G. W. F. Hegel, and Karl Marx. Their theories were juxtaposed to literary reflections upon the experience of historical change in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the works of Willa Cather (short stories) and E.M. Forster(*Howard's End*). Finally, the optimistic assumptions of Western Progress were confronted with the contradictory results of their implementation on a global scale through the work of historian, Theodore Von Laue.

The seminar discussions modeled the value of blending philosophical, historical and literary perspectives to reflect and make sense of the ethical conflicts which beset the economic, social, and political conditions of modernity. To further help faculty connect the study of humanistic texts to teaching practices, the seminar invited participants to compare La Salle's present curriculum with past and present efforts in higher education to integrate humanistic concerns in the curriculum, and to consider how themes explored in the seminar related to ethical dilemmas in their own fields.

The first session of each seminar began with an essay on higher education, such as:

"The Teaching of Ethics in the American Undergraduate Curriculum, 1876-1976," Douglas Sloan

"Teaching Ethics in Undergraduate Courses", Susan Resnick Parr

"Gatsby in the B School," Robert Coles

"Reconstructing Liberal Education: A Religious Perspective," Frank Reynolds

"The Challenge of Connecting Learning" (Liberal Learning and the Arts and Sciences Major, V. 1) Association of American Colleges Publication.

Two additional workshop sessions, one mid-way during the semester, and the other at the end, dealt with such questions as:"Does the present curriculum in your discipline address the ethical and social issues current in your field? How has the seminar influenced your ideas about its general themes? Would the experience of the seminar suggest ways seminar themes relevant to your discpline could be

introduced in your courses? Participants responded in writing to these questions prior to the sessions and duplicated their responses for the group. These brief writings, in some cases, became working papers for course innovations. In other cases, they were opportunities for reconceptualizing ethical and social issues in the disciplines in terms of the seminar themes. The unit on "progress" seemed especially powerful in this respect. For example, a professor in the Education Department said, "The theme of progress focused us on the notions of dialectics, conflicts, and striving for balance and integration. In terms of a philosophical orientation in the study of education and schooling this theme brought home the idea of growth through conflict, then resolution of this conflict." Another professor in the Finance Dept commented, "the notion that progress can be viewed as a unifying social ideal rather than a measure of the wealth generating ability of a nation is particularly relevant for students of economics and finance."

Though the scope of the seminars did not permit extensive discussion of pedagogy, part of the workshop sessions dealt with writing assignments and classroom practices useful for helping students explore ethical issues. Because ethical issues do not lend themselves to absolute proof, the goal of exopository discourse, we suggested that faculty consider framing writing assignments in the exploratory mode, an old but little appreciated genre

to facilitate thinking and writing about such matters. Faculty who had participated in the pilot project described earlier had had considerable success with exploratory writing. Exploration in its classical form of dialectic is one of several types of discourse distinguished by Aristotle. James Kinneavy, an important modern rhetoritician, follows Aristotle and Cicero in distinguishing dialectic from scientific demonstrative discourse. Demonstration aims at certitude. By contrast Aristotle conceived of dialectic as distinguished from demonstration precisely because its aim is not certitude, not yes or no, but what Kinneavy calls probable truth.

Dialectical thinking always concludes with qualified assertions rather than binary oppositions; dialectical thinking is relational. It is the truth of something compared with something else. By introducing the faculty to exploratory discourse we hoped not only to present an alternative to expository writing, but to encourage faculty to consider the implications of thinking about pedagogy rhetorically. What we teach may be strongly dictated by our scientific approach to the study of virtually all disciplines. The privileging of exposition to the total exclusion of other forms of discourse is only part of a larger picture. Kinneavy, for example, believes that "because many moral and political issues are not in the realm of the rigidly scientific they are simply omitted from the curriculum."

To bring the underlying concepts of the seminar to the attention of the broader La Salle faculty, outstanding humanist scholars with a demonstrated interest in connecting the study of humanistic texts to teaching practices or curriculum development were invited to address the faculty. These included rhetoriticians such as James Kinneavy, University of Texas and James Berlin, Purdue University. Carol Schneider, the Associate Vice President of the AAC, who has initiated several major national studies on curriculum in higher education, discussed reforms in general education related to multi-culturalism.

What have the seminars accomplished?

Some faculty have revised their courses almost immediately. For example, an instructor in the Criminal Justice program has revised his course, *Introduction to Criminal Justice* to include lectures, readings, and writing assignments "with classical and contemporary ethical and moral emphasis" (Finn Hornum, Criminal Justice Program). This instructor designed a pilot project involving two sections of the *Introduction to Criminal Justice* course to determine "whether philosophical and literary materials drawn from some of the classical ethical theories examined in the seminar could be used to lay the foundation for examining ethical and social dilemmas in the field." Students in the experimental class read *Antigone*, selections from Hobbes' *Leviathan* and Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government*. After teaching the course, he writes: "I have

been very pleased with the success of this project. The students in the section where this material was used, showed a better conceptual understanding of the criminal justice system."

Here are some representative comments of other instructors who transformed their courses soon after the seminar:

"...as a result of the seminar, my course in *Personality, Dynamics and Adjustment* is being rethought...I have rewritten parts of the course and have added two writing assignments that come straight from Pew/NEH." (Psychology)

" I have begun to develop ethical components in classes that I teach...." (Communications)

"...my teaching was influenced by my participation in last spring's NEH seminar... selection of texts and the grounding for seminar discussions...(Nursing)"

"I've made Von Laue the main text for my 303 in the fall. Smith, Mill, and possibly de Tocqueville, I plan to use in the 150." (History)

"I think I will incorporate the theme of conflict between community and democracy in social and political philosophy. I should say, not merely incorporate it, but make it a large portion and explicit theme of the course." (Philosophy)

Instructors who stated it was too early to modify courses described how the seminars influenced their general approach to teaching the subject matter of their disciplines. The following comments reflect their response to the question "Have you attempted in any way to modify your teaching as a result of the ideas generated by the seminar, or brought any new approach into the classroom?"

"Yes-to teach literature as a discipline that deals with big issues... want to find ways to bring vision and coherence to the question of values in literature."(English)

"...the seminar has enlarged and enriched my perceptions of some important questions which I will try even harder to bring to my students' attention." (Art History)

To conclude, the La Salle University Bulletin, like many other college bulletins states that a major the goal of the curriculum is to "encourage students to work out a system of values rooted in the best thinking of the great minds of the past and present." How higher education can meet this responsibility provides conversation for countless meetings, usually on the role of the core curriculum. The seminars gave us an opportunity to to reaffirm the value of traditions of study, long associated with a liberal education in accomplishing these aims, traditions of study which include the reading of serious, diverse texts against a backdrop of ideas significant to Western culture, including the importance of rhetoric. As the comments of the participants reveal, the seminars have reaffirmed faculty commitment to incorporating humanistic ideas in their courses at all levels. The NEH Project has proven its worth in stimulating the La Salle faculty to energetically engage in the process of "finding a common language to integrate the curriculum through the humanities."